Interim Evaluation of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

I.   Brief Overview of Laboratory

The Peer Review of the SEDL took place on May 10-14, 1998. The SEDL is a private nonprofit corporation which the Regional Educational Laboratory network includes New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

II.   Implementation and Management:

A.   To what extent is the REL doing what they were approved to do during their first three contract years?

Overall SEDL has conducted activities in a timely manner according to their contract and modifications.

A review of the Updated Annual Plan and Budget of the Third Year indicated some significant changes in a number of areas for example; discontinuing the Educator Exchange Programs, revising a project to link existing community development efforts to the school and moving it from Goal 6 to Goal 1 where it complements the CAT model for building community-school partnerships, refocus the SEDL was taking with Charter Schools, and redesigning the scope of Goal 5: Applying technology to restructuring and learning.

The REL went through some major restructuring both in personnel and major realignment of resources and workscope appeared to interfere with the contract continuing on schedule. It was evident that moving forward was important to the REL staff to get back on the course again. In the initial presentation by Joan and Wes, a process of mentoring new employees

into the work already in process was a strong concept and solution to getting people up to speed and maintaining a functional time line.

In the 1996 Technical Proposal which proposed to use new funds to enhance the REL in several goal areas. In Goal I, which looks at enhancing family and community involvement in education, the additional monies would be used to build the communities' capacity to access resources and expertise at their local/or regional levels to more effectively establish and sustain their CATs. The two Signature works presented appeared to have a good literature base with an adequate QA process. The references provided for Goal 5 were reviewed. They appeared current, relevant, and appropriate to carry out the intended workscope.

Due to the short amount of time left in the Lab contract, hiring a qualified person for the LDP may be an obstacle in bring the Specialty Area up to the appropriate time line. The products reviewed and services talked about in the Signature Works interviews appeared adequate and within the contract projections.

Issues

There seems to be minimal cross collaboration or consultation within the Lab except on an informal basis and only when an individual takes the initiative to facilitate collaboration.

Though there does not seem to be the same effort or emphasis on all the programs, the two signature programs reviewed; the TAP and the CAT, were good examples of works that had a lot of time and energy put into them due to a variety of reasons. Goal 2: Addressing Diversity: Language and Culture including Task 7: Language and Cultural Diversity are considered SEDL's specialty area and it appears to be progressing at a slower pace without a program manager who is there daily and on a consistent basis to guide and promote their Specialty Area. There is a visible need for a manger whose main focus is language and cultural diversity with the emphasis

on more comprehensive development of this topic area considering this Specialty area and it is integral to the region.

The language and cultural diversity philosophy needs to be infused throughout the Lab in every aspect from the conception of every program across the Lab, to product development, to the hiring practices, to all the interactions that occur internally and external to the Lab.

The Lab came up with a good idea of getting their board members more involved with the Lab programs and more knowledgeable by assigning them to Goal areas and then having them present to the other board members on their Goal.

B.   To what extent is the REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

SEDL provided several documents which illustrated a self-monitoring and QA process which resulted in revisions in the original ideas and concepts due to the feedback from the field sites which was used as the foundation for the module development; Pilot and Field Test Feedback, the memo regarding SEDL Program Review and Redesign of Goal 1, and in Selected field feedback on CAT process and materials.

The SEDL during its reorganization reviewed its work and redesigned a number of the goals to reflect the change in direction and philosophy of the new administration and staff. The redesign of Goal 1 was an example.

An example of an internal self-monitoring process given during the staff presentation was the use of a Peer Review Team who take a look at other program's works and provide them with feedback. A literature review was done on the issues in collaborative work as well as needs assessments and field feedback on CAT process and materials.

The development of the modules for LDP were tested with a volunteer site which then

provided feedback on how the modules could be further developed and revised. These modules are now being used with one school site in Albuquerque.

III.   Quality

To what extent is the REL developing high quality services and products?

The sample products provided were of good quality with relevant and useable information with adequate documentation of literature reviews that contained current materials. In the Native Education Resources for the Southwest Region was comprehensive though there were two very excellent resources out of Albuquerque it was missing. The Southwest Indian Polytech Institute (SIPI) and an early childhood program which services only pueblo families with young children, Native American Pueblo Parent Resource (NAPPR).

Pilot and field tests, participant evaluations of CAT training institute, along with state site reports are a few ways it was indicated peer reviews were done.

It was indicated that some of the Lab projects overlap to some extent such as the LDP and Technology Assistance Program (TAP) with shared staff.

As a person working with a university and in a center whose primary focuses is on preservice, training and technical assistance, and linguistic and cultural diversity in an area where SEDL has numerous demonstration sites, some of which have been in place from the on set of the contract, and have not come in contact with their work or heard mention of them.

IV.   Utility

A.   To what extent are the products and services provided by the Lab useful to, and used by customers?

Testimonials by site staff of the CAT and TAP were very supportive of the services of SEDL and the Lab and the products being generated out of the Lab for their use in the projects. The TAP persons stated they could see significant academic improvements in their students when the use of technology and CLE were adopted compared to traditional teaching. The improvements were noted to be compared to the previous year students who were not part of the TAP project. There was more enthusiasm to learn by the students and more creativity in teaching by the teachers.

In a memo from a Magdalena Rood who observed a workshop on Applying Technology to Restructuring and Learning, on August 20, 1998, made an observation of the presentation style of one of the presenters from SEDL. Her style seemed a direct conflict to the constructivist approach resulting in the teachers exhibiting "behaviors that causes great consternation for traditional teachers- students who are not paying any attention".

The emphasis of the CAT project to enhance the family and community involvement in education which the testimonial by one principal indicated this project provided a model for reorganizing his school, make it more family friendly, to get the parents more involved with their children's academics and with the school and have a means by which to address issues relevant to schools such as school violence, drop-out, gangs, teen pregnancy. With the engagement of community people, it was stated a growth in business was one of the results.

The concept of using community people to become co-developers in the CAT project is an important factor in building community capacity and facilitating people to be self-sufficient.

Issues

The products and services along with the Lab do not seem to be widely utilized or recognized as a resource for development of other products or programs.

B.   **To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?**

The Lab did extensive regional needs sensing, community surveys, and assessments before choosing specific demonstration and pilot sites. The Lab used the information and feedback from the pilot programs, field-testing, QA, observation and field notes, customer satisfaction to redesign and tailor modules, trainings and workshops to the specific communities. The CAT was translated into Spanish in direct response to customer needs.

There have been a number of ways developed to access products and services; through the CRSD and Policy Websites, through workshops; Texas CRSD Workshop as well as presentations made related to the TAP. At the sites implementing CAT, the staff reportedly has been consistent in the facilitating the development and implementation of the signature works as well as responsive to making changes and modifications deemed needed from site feedback and input.

The testimonials show great enthusiasm for the projects they were involved in and the value of getting students involved and expand their view of importance of what goes on around them. The importance of bridging the gaps between the community, parents, children and the schools is vital in this day and age of poor student success. The focus and premise of the CAT and TAP projects are important in that they are setting up a framework by which community capacity is being built.

Issues

The community site persons were asking for hard data resulting from their involvement in the Lab programs such as CAT, which they could use to support their requests for additional and supplemental funding.

The prime directives indicated the Lab to be involved in a population that is culturally and linguistically diverse. The issues around diversity are directly related to all aspects of all of the projects as well as the Lab itself. To be truly responsive to their consumers, the Lab needs to address the vital importance of the infusion and integrating of cultural awareness and competency into all aspects of the Lab from their mission statement, to daily interactions to hiring and especially into their programs across the Lab. To develop a conceptual frame work and modules to be piloted in the community is a good start but to be seen as separate, isolated from all other aspects of the Lab and not interwoven into the very fabric is truly unresponsive to the diversity in the region they are to serve.

V.   Outcomes and Impact

A.   To what extent is the REL's work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?

REL utilized a sound model based on an adequate base of literature for the development of the CAT, TAP, and Organizing for Diversity projects. There are specific 5-year evaluation plans for CAT and TAP. There was documentation of needs assessments, which then impacted on tailoring the project to the specific sites. It appears through field notes and logs, testimonials and requests from the field for further products and services that the projects were contributing to student success, building community capacity and partnerships. The performance indicators

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from CAT supported positive impacts on partnerships that developed at the sites. The CRSD, Policy Websites and the Texas CRSD Workshop are other supplied indicators of ways SEDL are other avenues for building the community's knowledge base on relevant issues related to education locally and at a national level.

CAT and TAP have a focus on professional development especially of the teachers with the concept in mind that to effect student outcomes, there needs to be a support and avenue for changing in the way teachers teach. The interview with Pat Guerra regarding diversity reinforced the importance for the need for intense language and cultural diversity awareness training for teachers and all Lab staff. The data that was collected through a variety of ways was related to their specific focus and goals.

Issues

There is an apparent lack of hard data over time, which the sites requested from REL. In the interviews with the site people they indicated a strong need for the data to secure outside and additional funding.

There is a need for the evaluation piece to be infused into and across all programs so that a clear concise picture of what the Lab is doing as a whole is readily available. It is then necessary to look more closely at the importance of hiring a person into the Institutional Assessment and Evaluation piece of SEDL.

The need for language and cultural diversity training became evident with the sites have primarily Anglo teachers with students of cultural and language differing significantly. The sites are specifically chosen for their diversity and when the staff lacks diversity it may impact on the outcomes.

B.   To what extent does the Lab assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

The basic concepts and goals of REL support SEDL's goals and projects to assist the 5 states in school reform. There was discussion around how an alliance was formed with the states to coordinate and develop state plans and strategies around school reform. Joyce talked about the policy project which has been in place for the passed 9 years and in the passed 3 years how they have enlisted the 30 people from the region as key players in facilitating school change. They use the so-developers as advisors and network with the Regional Advisory Policy Network annually. If issues come up they will meet as needed to address those issues. They look at accountability and teacher issues around diversity. There are frequent phone conversations, e-mail around issues they feel are important. Generally, the Lab is responding to issues by providing information on topic areas, which they would expand on and help those requesting the information to be proactive.

The Lab appears to have some strong research and development skills with a creative vision, which seems to be responding to the community needs and current trend in thinking. With the intense restructuring and revisiting of the Lab's workscope and direction, some projects were reevaluated and discontinued. The binational program was continued until circumstances beyond the Lab's control made it impossible to continue. Similar to the teacher exchange and the charter school programs. They were completed as far as possible, dropped and energy and resources were then directed into more viable programs.

Some of the strategies being taken by Goal 6 management are targeting collaboration with other Labs to effect policy and school change. Working with the professional learning community to emphasize whole school change by developing an infrastructure of school staff.

Project FIRST targets comprehensive school change by developing a conceptual framework for school reform though no work has been done up to this time with it.

The project on Organizing for Cultural Diversity has excellent potential, as does its staff. It has the inherent ability to effect positive school wide change when teachers and staff become curtly aware and sensitive to the rich diversity around them. The professional development of teachers and use of professional learning committees can be used to address issues around school reform and how to impact student success. The OCD was based on literature centering on intercultural communication. This piece is developing slowly and with much forethought and consultation from expertise at the University of Texas on the development of the modules and research design. A previous focus had been on Native American language preservation. It was felt that the Lab did not have the resources or capabilities to carry out the original focus and it was redesigned to focus on intercultural communication and its effect on learning. There is a move towards looking at using study circles to pull members of the diverse community.

Issues

A few staff members are known and respected at a national level and their expertise in area of school reform is solicited extensively outside the Lab though their expertise does not seem to be utilized to the maximum within the Lab itself. This lack of cohesiveness and consistent cross utilization of expertise, products, and staff seems to impede the development of an overall exceptional Lab.

C.   To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

There are some good products being developed at the Lab as well as some that are still in the process of development such as the CAT and TAP with Organizing for Diversity Modules.

There are good foundations and components that could be expanded upon across the Lab as well as in the region. The Lab made appropriate decisions to drop or completed as best they could, some projects that were no longer viable or workable for example the binational program, charter school and teacher exchange program.

The Lab's work is definitely going forward maybe not at the pace expected for being in the third year of a contract though very well with the extensive restructuring, reorganizing, significant change in staff. The change in philosophy and revisiting the entire workscope contributed significantly to the delay though all the changes were necessary to move the Lab forward and more progressive.

Issues

There is some question as to how and where they are disseminating the information. The information does not seem to be readily visible at the university level even in the specific sites. There have been workshops and trainings given in the city of a major university in their region and the constituents at that university who have expertise in the prime focus areas of the Lab and those people seem were not aware of or to have received any information or sample products of the Lab.

The Lab has not seemed to seek out other nationally known experts that are residing at universities in their own region especially in the areas of language and cultural diversity, technology and policy development and school reform. There are many resources at the University of New Mexico.

Some Lab members have a national reputation though the Lab at this point has not seemed to have developed a national reputation for its work, products it produces or as a resource by other institutions of higher learning.

VI.   Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products and Services

Overall, SEDL appears to be doing what they are contracted to do with good quality services delivered and products being produced or in the works though there was noted to be a lack of cultural competence and diversity across the SEDL. They have strong and creative management with a focus on improving and making their services and products high quality. Due to their intensive restructuring and redesigning of their workscope and projects, it is questionable whether SEDL will be able to meet their time line.

Strengths

SEDL has strong management with innovative management and development strategies; good research based established for the foundation of philosophy for the development of services and products; saw the need for intensive restructuring; took the time to rethink and redesign their work scope even though the procedure put them seriously behind schedule; there was the foresightedness to drop projects that were no longer relevant or viable, refocusing others.

SEDL used feedback from consumers, field notes, surveys and needs assessments to tailor their work, products and services to fit the specific communities they were in

Issues

SEDL's focus is to serve the diverse populations of five states that are culturally and linguistically diverse while they have a serious lack of diversity within their staff; there is a lack of cultural awareness and cultural competence across SEDL which in turn impacts the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of the content in the services and products; a comment made by a SEDL staff member indicated that if "they" don't look Indian, there isn't any difference in culture; lost significant time due to restructuring; too much tailoring to communities may limit the usability of the products and services and ability to scale up; lack of visibility to major

university in the demonstration site area and other agencies that are directly related to their scope of work the vacancies in SEDL's areas of evaluation and language and cultural diversity have significant impact on how well the programs are being developed and implemented.

Lack of using in-house resources and collaboration across SEDL.